

THE TWELVE ANCIENT GATES OF BUKHARA

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Annotation

This article discusses the historical state of the twelve ancient gates of Bukhara city and their recent restoration.

As part of the preparations for the 2500th anniversary of Bukhara, numerous monuments, such as the Kalon architectural complex, Mir-Arab, Ulugbek madrasas, Ark citadel, Samanid mausoleum, and Labi-Hauz complex, were restored to their original state. The tombs of Sufi scholars like Abdulkhaliq Ghijduvani, Bahouddin Naqshband, and Sayyid Mir Kulol were newly constructed, and the Chorbakr architectural complex, which was on the verge of collapsing due to neglect, was restored.

The ancient fortress surrounding Bukhara and its gates have been an integral part of the city's urban planning and architecture for centuries. However, in the autumn of 1920, during the Red Army's invasion of Bukhara, the city's fortress and gates were shelled and bombarded. Socialist urban planning paid no attention to national values and traditions, and insufficient funds were allocated from the state budget for restoring our monuments. Consequently, only a few meters of the 12-kilometer-long fortress and only 2 out of the ancient gates remained, threatening the city's unique architectural identity. The regional governor, S. Husenov, recognizing this, initiated the restoration of part of the ancient fortress and the city gates with the help of a group of generous sponsors, talented architects, and restorers. The materials on the third page of our newspaper are dedicated to the scientific and creative research, sincere efforts, and results achieved in this direction.

A group of restorers led by Olim Abdiev, a laureate of the State Prize of the Republic of Uzbekistan, reconstructed the Samarkand Gate, built by Bukhara ruler Abdulaziz Khan in the 16th century along the Great Silk Road, on its original foundation in 2009, based on a project by architect Mahmud Ahmedov.

“I have dedicated nearly half of my life to preserving monuments, organizing restoration work, and providing leadership. Still, I have never seen the enthusiasm for work and the significant care for cultural heritage that we have now,” says veteran architect Ismat Muhsinov. “During the Soviet era, the budget allocated for preserving monuments was so small that only one or two mosques or madrasas were lightly restored each year in our region, which has over 1,000 historical monuments. Skilled craftsmen like Ochil Bobomurodov, Aminjon Salomov, and Akhror Asrorov were forced to build houses for citizens for a living instead of restoring monuments in the 1960s and 1970s. In the last 14 years, the scope of restoration work in our region has expanded significantly, providing employment not only for Bukhara's artisans and craftsmen but also attracting craftsmen from Khorezm, Karakalpakstan, Kashkadarya, Samarkand, and the Fergana Valley for tasks like restoring the ancient fortress, improving pilgrimage sites, and more.”

The reconstruction of Bukhara's city gates filled the heart of the veteran architect with joy and invited him to share his extensive knowledge and experience in restoration with young specialists and craftsmen, offering them advice and participating in the process. Relying on his long-standing research, archival materials, old photographs, and Russian scientists' schematics, Ismat Muhsinov corrected the notion that Bukhara had only 11 gates, proposing that there were 12 gates. He, along with his colleague Komil Ikromov, created a map of the areas where Bukhara's city gates were located in the 18th-19th centuries. The veteran architect wrote about each gate's history and published their photographs in the press. These materials are expected to be published in book form soon.

"We try to consider Ismat aka and other experts' constructive suggestions," says architect Mahmud Ahmedov, who designed projects for the reconstruction of Sheikh Jalol, Samarkand, Hazrat Imam, and Sallohkhona Gates. "When designing these structures, we aimed to ensure that they fit harmoniously with their surroundings and serve the people of Bukhara, rather than being merely decorative structures." For example, the newly restored Sheikh Jalol Gate blends well with the ancient fortress and the Khoja Ismat Bukhari complex, and the Samarkand Gate, adjacent to the newly established handicraft center, and the Sallohkhona Gate, which is nearing completion, harmonize beautifully with the historic city.

Muzaffar Mirzaev, a skilled restorer whose father and brother were master restorers, was not initially taught the trade. "He might only work haphazardly," they thought. However, Uzbekistan's honored cultural worker Rabijon Qurbanov became his mentor. While still in 9th grade, Muzaffar rushed to his mentor after classes daily, helping with heavy tasks and learning the craft. Before finishing school, he became a worker at the Shirin Murodov Restoration Workshop. In 1970, he enrolled in the evening division of the Faculty of Construction at the Bukhara Institute of Light and Food Industry to deepen his knowledge of construction. During the day, he worked with master Ochil Bobomurodov, helping to restore various mosques and madrasas. After serving in the military, he learned to straighten leaning minarets with steel cables, strengthen foundations, and build new structures. The restored Gavkushon Madrasa, the leaning minaret next to Bolo Hauz Mosque, the miniature minarets at Sayyid Mir Kulol and Saifuddin Boharzi, all showcase Muzaffar Mirzaev and his apprentices' meticulous work.

In 1997, he established his private firm, "Usto Mirzo," leading a team of 17 craftsmen, including his sons Ma'mur and Bahodir, and colleagues like Sharif Rahimov and Shuhrat Obidov. The firm actively participated in restoration works at Abdullahon Tim, Khalifa Khudoydod, Valid-i-Abdulaziz Khan madrasas, Chorbakr, and Bahouddin Naqshband architectural complexes.

In 2008, when efforts to restore the city wall and ancient gates of Bukhara began, Muzaffar Mirzaev and his restorers were tasked with reconstructing the completely demolished Sheikh Jalol Gate. Before starting, he identified the original location of the ancient gate with architects and historians, studied aerial photographs and archival materials, and then commenced construction. Through their efforts, the Sheikh Jalol Gate rose once more, harmonizing with the ancient fortress and the Khoja Ismat Bukhari complex.

The project to build the Abu Hafs Kabir historical and architectural complex aimed to restore the Hazrat Imam Gate, adjacent to the cemetery where the scholar is buried, as a mark of respect for his contributions to Islam. This task was also assigned to the "Usto Mirzo" firm by the regional administration.

The gate, originally known as Khufra or Darvozai Nav until the 8th century, was named Hazrat Imam Gate after Abu Hafs Kabir was buried nearby. The architect, Mahmud Ahmedov, considering these aspects, designed the gate as the starting point of the pilgrimage site.

Each tower of the gate, with a diameter of 8.5 meters, was fortified using traditional methods, placing dry reed, limestone, and reed layers atop the stones before laying the bricks, protecting the new structure from water and salt damage. Muzaffar Mirzaev estimated that it would require 365,000 regular bricks, 52,000 decorative bricks, and 65,000 cubic meters of concrete. When completed, everyone involved in the construction marveled at how accurate his estimates were.

This wasn't mere luck but the result of his 40 years of experience in restoration. Perhaps those who restore sacred sites are blessed with such extraordinary qualities.

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